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ABSTRACT

Eight case studies representing valid and extensive reading research were reviewed to determine the impact of school principals on student reading achievement. In all eight studies, principal leadership behavior was positively associated with reading achievement and school outcomes. Evidence indicated that reading effectiveness was enhanced by principals who (1) create a safe, orderly school environment conducive to learning; (2) showed a high degree of program involvement; (3) established clear learning goals; (4) encouraged a high level of expectation of student achievement; and (5) used performance data both to evaluate student skills and to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the reading curriculum. (MM)

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A PRESENTATION AT
THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

May 1983
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by
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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND READING ACHIEVEMENT: EIGHT CASE-STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The direct responsibility for improving reading instruction and learning rests in the hand of the school principal. Do principals of schools with high reading achievement exhibit any particular style of leadership style? The research indicates that they do. The focus of this search is to answer the question: Do principals make a difference in the reading achievement of students and if so, which leadership behaviors are associated with a positive outcome? The evidence presented here is based on eight studies that represent the most valid and extensive research. (1) Reading, Inner-City Children (1971), (2) New York State Performance Review (1974), (3) The California School Effectiveness Study (1976), (4) ESAA In-Depth Study (1978), (5) Search for Effective Schools(1978), (6) School Social Systems and School Achievement (1979), (7) Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children (1979), (8) The School Improvement Project (1979). The evidence clearly indicates that principals do make a difference, for leadership behavior was positively associated with school outcome and reading achievement in the eight studies.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND READING ACHIEVEMENT: EIGHT CASE-STUDIES

School effectiveness has been a concern for educators for the past two decades. While the 60's were marked by large national studies investigating the effects of input variables such as quantities of resources, pupil characteristics, pupil-teacher ratios, and teaching methods, recent research studies have focused directly on school processes. Each of the studies described in this paper, however, use the case study or organizational approach which provides an understanding of not only how an organization functions, but why it behaves the way it does.

Assessing the validity of case studies is difficult, if not impossible, because there are no formal criteria to guide analysis. To counter such liability, four criteria for selecting the reading research were used for selecting the reading research used in this review: 1) evidence that the study was internally valid, that is, appropriate measuring instruments were used for reading performance, 2) evidence of control for student variables such as SES, ability, and other pupil characteristics, 3) evidence that the research was conducted in schools categorized as "effective" based upon the operational definition of reading achievement, and 4) evidence that significant positive relationships between reading achievement and instructional leadership were reported.

A number of studies meet these criteria. The evidence presented in this paper is based upon eight studies that reprsent some of the most valid and extensive research. The focus of this search is to answer the question: Do principals make a difference

in the reading achievement of students and, if so, which leadership behaviors are associated with a positive outcome? The following is a chronological review of the literature.

1. **Reading, Inner City Children** (Weber, 1971). Weber's findings provided educators with a point of departure from the devastating Coleman Report (1966). Weber's study achieved its purpose for it was intended as an alternative to Coleman's widely accepted conclusion that schools did not make a difference; a student's achievement is exclusively a function of family background and socioeconomic status. Conducted in four inner-city schools in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Kansas City, results pointed toward the school as the determinant of success in third grade reading achievement.

The schools Weber examined indicated a significant number of poor students scoring above the national reading norms. The results clearly showed that reading ability in the four schools was similar to those of students in average income schools. Interviews with staff and observations of classes during reading instruction revealed that successful schools placed a decided emphasis on reading success; frequent and systematic evaluation of student progress; and a calm, orderly, and quiet school atmosphere. Leadership appeared to be a significant factor; school administrators set the tone for the school's instructional climate and assumed responsibility for the allocation of resources to attain defined goals.

2. **New York State Performance Review** (1974). Prior to 1974 there were few studies linking school leadership with

with academic achievement. The New York studies not only confirmed the findings of Weber; they also pointed to the school environment as a means to compare achievement scores. Two inner-city schools in New York City that matched on significant environmental and socioeconomic factors but differed significantly in reading achievement were studied in depth. The analysis revealed that differences in student achievement appeared to be attributable to factors under the control of the school (and the principal), and many of them were highly related to the principal's behavior. Specifically, the principal of the more effective school had developed and implemented a plan for dealing with reading problems, provided a balance between management and instruction, and required frequent evaluation of student progress. The New York State Performance Review stated that the principal appeared to be "quietly everywhere, observing teachers and students." The principal was involved in explaining district plans for improvement, establishing plans for educational improvement, and promoting a stable school atmosphere.

3. **The California School Effectiveness Study** (Madden and others, 1976). The Madden study is especially noteworthy for two main reasons: it paralleled both the Weber study and the New York State Performance Review on reading achievement and it was more rigorous and extensive. Identifying twenty-one pairs of elementary schools that matched on the basis of student characteristics but differed on standardized achievement measures in total reading and reading subscores, the research by Madden and his colleagues seemed to differentiate effective from less effective schools in the follwing ways: 1) teachers reported

receiving more professional and supervisory support in reading; 2) there was an atmosphere conducive to learning; 3) the principal had a significant impact on educational decisionmaking with regard to reading; 4) there was significant evidence of student progress monitoring; and 5) there was additional emphasis on reading achievement from the building principal.

4) **ESAA In-Depth Study** (Wellisch and others, 1978). As part of the effort to evaluate the impact of the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), Wellisch and others examined leadership behavior in nine elementary schools that had made significant gains in reading and mathemetics as contrasted with thirteen less effective schools. The researchers examined four facets of instructional leadership. The first concern was for the support of teachers. Teachers were asked if their principal felt strongly about instruction, had a definite instructional perspective, and encouraged various teaching strategies. On a scale of 0 to 4, where high scores indicated a strong concern, the median score in successful schools was 2.9 compared with 1.0 in non-successful schools--a highly significant finding. Similar findings were reported for the second aspect of instructional leadership--communication about reading instruction. Schools in which teachers reported reading performance was regularly reviewed and discussed were significantly more likely to show achievement gains.

The third area of inquiry was responsibility for instruction. Teachers were asked to examine how they and their administrators participated in discussions concerning instruction, in selecting instructional materials, in planning programs for the entire

school, and evaluating instructional programs. Schools in which teachers attributed more responsibility to the principal in a greater number of areas were significantly more likely to be successful. Finally, perceptions of staff were used to categorize schools on instructional program coordination, and the relationship between such coordination and student achievement was examined. Instructional program coordination was defined in terms of content, sequence of objectives, and the use of appropriate materials throughout all grade levels. Based on staff evaluations, schools were significantly more likely to show gains in achievement where instructional programs were effectively and systematically coordinated by the building principal.

5. **Search for Effective Schools** (Edmonds,1978). Edmonds, through his efforts to identify and analyze urban schools that are instructionally effective for poor and minority students, has been a major contributor to school effectiveness research. His initial efforts were as project director of Harvard University's "Search for Effective Schools." These studies included twenty schools in Detroit's Model Cities Neighborhood, a re-analysis of the 1966 Equal Opportunity Survey (EEOS) data (Frederiksen, 1975), and an analysis of the differences that may be attributable to leadership skills. Effective schools, according to Edmonds, are marked by leaders who:

-Promote an atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to learning.

-Frequently monitor student progress.

-Ensure that it is incumbent upon the staff to be "instruc-

tionally effective" for all students.

-Set clearly stated goals and learning objectives.

-Demonstrate strong leadership with an effective mix of management, communication, and instructional skills.

6. **School Social Systems and School Achievement** (Brookover and others, 1979). Brookover's contribution to school effectiveness research and reading is significant due to its breadth and its relatively large sample of schools of disparate racial composition. This research effort also utilized the case study approach. Preliminary investigation by Brookover and Schneider (1975) and Brookover and Lezotte (1977) indicated that there were marked differences in leadership in effective schools and ineffective schools. Leaders in the effective schools were more assertive, more effective disciplinarians, and more inclined to assume responsibility. Emphasis on instruction and student achievment was pervasive in their schools. On the basis of this early research, Brookover and others (1979) designed a study to examine the hypothesis that differences in school systems (and the individual schools) explain differences in student outcome among schools. Schools in Brookover's study included three groups of Michigan elementary schools: a representative state sample (68), a majority black sample(30), and a majority white sample (61). Analyses of data from these schools suggested that a major portior of the variance in achievement between schools was explained by three components of the school social system: 1) student inputs, 2) school social structures, and 3) school climate.

This investigation set the stage for case studies in four

low SES schools. Ten were majority schools differing in effectiveness as determined by achievement score, the others were majority black schools differing in effectiveness as determined by standardized achievement test scores. Supervision in the successful schools was decidedly different from that of the unsuccessful schools, the principal "dropped in" on classrooms frequently, visiting each class approximately thirty times per year. Although the principal was not innovative in terms of "new programs," interaction techniques, or instructional materials, during a three-month observation period he tried to organize teacher effectiveness training and held meetings with small groups of teachers to discuss their students' achievement. The principal's concern for achievement was known to both students and teachers as were his high expectations. He exhibited a commitment to ensuring that students could and should be achieving at relatively high levels. He also motivated students to assume responsibility for reaching such levels.

Principals in less effective schools were perceived quite differently. One was almost totally bogged down with discipline and administrative problems and showed indifference toward instructional leadership and academic achievement. Teachers in this school seemed preoccupied with maintenance and "survival." The principal in the other less effective school was also ineffective despite a concern for instruction and achievement. Although she frequently reminded teachers that reading performance was a high priority, she provided little leadership to make such a priority a reality. Teachers, in turn, made few demands on their students. While the principal was perceived

as "someone nice to work for" there was little evidence that there was a concern for student achievement. Brookover's insight into leadership differences and performance is concise and straightforward: "lack of pressure relative to teacher performance and little emphasis on increased achievement appeared to differentiate low achieving schools from those more effective" (Brookover and others, 1979).

7. **Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children** (Rutter and others, 1979). No study in the school effectiveness literature has successfully captured the process of education within individual schools relative to the reading process to the extent that Rutter and his colleagues (1979) have. Fifteen hundred junior high school aged students in twelve inner-city schools of London were the object of this detailed longitudinal analysis. Youngsters were assessed on the school entry variables and reassessed at exit three years later. Based on an analysis of the standardized test scores, schools appeared to have a positive influence on student progress. During a two year period, observations, interviews, and surveys were directed toward analyzing the kinds of environments provided for teaching and learning, as well as such variables as academic emphasis on reading, teaching skills, student participation, and pupil evaluation. A wide range of observations, including one complete week of observing lessons in each school, provided an understanding of the school process and school climate.

The researchers concluded that the influence on the head teacher (supervisor) was very considerable. Investigation of

more than seventy variables suggested that the combined (interactive) effect was more powerful than any single variable. There also appeared to be a connection between this interactive effect, or ethos, and school leadership. For example, school outcomes tended to be better when the curriculum and approaches to discipline were agreed upon and mutually supported by the staff and administration acting in concert. Examination successes were more frequent and delinquency less common in schools where student behavior was based on expectations set by the school rather than those left to the individual teacher. In schools with higher outcomes, decisions tended to be a consensus between staff and administration. Finally, the school climate was found to be greatly influenced by the degree to which the school functioned as a coherent whole, with agreed ways of accomplishing instructional tasks.

8. **The School Improvemnt Project** (Edmonds, 1979). Conducted in nine elementary schools in New York City, this research is a continuation of Edmonds' earlier study in reading achievement. Based upon previous findings, five factors associated with school success were identified: 1) administrative style, 2) school climate, 3) schoolwide expectations, 4) teacher expectations, 5) continuous sssessment of student progress. School effectiveness was defined by scores on a citywide reading achievement test in the public schools. Citywide rankings of this measure were used to differentiate highly effective schools from less effective schools. Schools that demonstrated substantial upward movement in the rankings over a four-year period were categorized as "improvers;" those which over the

same period of time demonstrated no substantial upward movement were categorezed as "maintaining/declining." Pairs of maintaining/declining schools from separate communities, matched on defined environmental variables were selected from the five districts.

The data directly supports the importance of instructional supervision. The researcher found that 90 to 100 percent of the teachers in the "improving" schools reported effective instructional coordination. These schools also provided regular administrative response to student difficulties, practical faculty meetings, opportunities for staff input on curriculum matters, and appropriate inservice training. Teachers in "maintaining/declining" schools, on the other hand, indicated an overall dissatisfaction with the school's instructional goals and curriculum supervision. In addition, 50 to 80 percent of the teachers in the "maintaining/declining" schools reported inservice training, teacher involvement with the curriculum, coordination of instructionm, and instructional materials to be inadequate. The vast majority of teachers in improving schools reported effective communication with their building principal and an orderly atmosphere in their schools.

The Five Correlates of Instructional Leadership and Reading Achievement

The evidence clearly indicates that building level administrators do make a difference, for leadership behavior was positively associated with school outcome and reading achievement in the eight studies. Of equal import was the emergence of specific leadership behaviors consistently associated with effective reading programs. The following correlates of leadership style seem

to be associated with positive reading achievement:

1. **School Climate**. In order to have a productive learning environment, it is important that the effective school possess a positive school climate. This phenomena is generally defined by researchers as a safe, orderly environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. While there is probably no perfect definition for school climate, there are certain policies, practices, and procedures which are essential to developing and maintaining a positive climate within a given school. The eight studies provide four indicators of school climate:

-Students who have a positive attitude toward the teaching and learning environment.

-Teachers who take responsibility for all students at all times.

-Teachers and students who recognize that there are defined standards of behavior which must be maintained.

-Teachers and students who maintain a respect for the building as well as the institution.

2. **Leadership**. Appropriate and effective leadership is essential in any successful organization. More often than not, the attitudes conveyed by the individual in the leadership position manifest themselves throughout the entire system. Therefore, the attitude, as well as the degree of involvement, of a principal was considered a critical element in operation of an effective school.

If the instructional programs at a given school are to be successful, it is imperative that the principal be an active par-

ticipant in the learning process. Interaction between principal and teacher with regard to classroom activities seems to be the foundation for academic success. Such principals take part in instructional decision-making and accept responsibility for the decisions about methods, materials, and evaluation of a well-defined reading curriculum. In addition, they provide plans for solving student's learning needs by integrating course content, interrelating sequences of objectives, and providing learning materials in all grades.

The relationship between principal and teacher is important because of the fact that there are usually several ways that reading can be taught. Most of the studies reinforced the importance of a meaningful communication channel between principal and teacher. In other words, effective principals are not just the administrative head of a school with regard to the chain of command; they are responsible and responsive to the upkeep of the classroom. Such leadership behavior may be translated into a cycle that provides teachers with meaningful information about the reading curriculum. The techniques employed by effective principals in the eight studies included: 1) active participation in the reading program, 2) frequent observation in the classroom, 3) instructional leadership in the reading curriculum, and 4) direct intervention providing alternatives to solve reading problems.

3. **Goals and Purposes**. Identification of essential goals and purposes is critical when attempting any worthwhile project. Without goals and purposes, the path to success is difficult. In the eight studies, the school's commitment to reading was apparent and was observed by most of the instructional staff. The presence

of commonly understood and mutually supported goals and purposes seems to be a central element in the successful schools.

When common goals are identified, schools are more cohesive, a learning focus is present, and a systematic approach to instructional decision-making is used. Schools in which academic achievement is a fundamental purpose allows the organization to operate more efficiently. As a result, effective administrators and teachers are aware of the learning activities that take place with regard to the total instructional process. The eight studies support the conclusion that a well-defined reading curriculum:

-Provides stability when there is a high rate of student mobility.

-Provides the opportunity to acquire the same skills and knowledge regardless of school location or instructional strategy.

-Provides a systemic approach to the measurement of student mastery.

In summary, it is important that the effective school organization be administered in such a manner that it promotes common learning goals. Such goals are made operational by the building administrator. The foundation for this procedure is created and enhanced by the establishment of a standard reading curriculum. With a reading curriculum established and instructional purposes recognized, the effective school surpasses basic mastery of learning objectives.

4. **Expectations**. Teachers in effective schools are firm believers that children should be required to attain at least minimal mastery of a given subject. The educational literature indicates that an attitude of this type, if supported by the staff, will maximize student achievement. In the eight studies

examined, the principal had a major role in establishing and maintaining such expectations.

According to the research, the school staff that expects high levels of performance usually attains positive levels of student achievement. The staff of an effective school usually maintains an unusually high level of expectation with regard to the accomplishments of their students. In the eight studies, the following examples of positive student expectations were noted: 1) higher levels of direct student involvement with teacher initiated reading instruction, 2) delineated expectations of what is expected from students, 3) relatively little wasted time, confusion, and disruption and, 4) a positive climate in the classroom that is "work-oriented", yet relaxed and pleasant.

5. **Measurement of Student Progress**. One of the most controversial issues regarding student performance is the use of standardized tests to measure achievement. In the eight studies, measures of norm-reference were used to evaluate academic performance. Data from these measures is used to compare the achievement levels of high, middle, or low income students. Each researcher in the eight studies apparently recognized the strengths (and limitations) of this type of evaluation.

Effective schools use performance data to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the reading curriculum as well as to evaluate student performance relative to the norm. Many of the effective schools also use criterion measures of mastery. This dual approach permits systematic analysis of individual progress as well as group evaluation over time.

It is important to note, however, that the administrators and teachers in successful schools used norm and criterion test data as only one means to administrate and evaluate the reading curriculum.

The evidence in these five areas clearly indicates that principals do make a difference, for leadership behavior was positively associated with school outcome and reading achievement in the eight studies. Of equal importance was the emergence of specific leadership behaviors consistently associated with effective reading programs. Figure 1 shows five correlats of instructional leadership that were found to be associated with school effectiveness.

Clearly, the implications of this paradigm indicate that reading effectiveness is enhanced by principals who provide leadership, establish student expectations, measure student progress, promote school climate, and establish goals and purposes. Coordination of instruction and support of teachers also received strong support when one considers that the studies were aimed at school processes, not at curriculum. For example, it is possible that findings related to the school's climate may have incorporated the concept of teacher support, for discipline was frequently mentioned. Taken as a whole, these results strongly suggest that principals who emphasize instruction; maintain an assertive, results-oriented climate; and develop and maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning make a significant instructional difference--one reflected in improved reading outcomes. Besides being intuitively pleasing, this view is consistent with current administration and supervision liter-

Figure 1. Leadership Behaviors Positively Associated with Reading Outcome

Supervisory Behavior	Weber	New York State Performance Review	Madden	Wellisch	Edmonds	Brookover	School Improvement Model	Rutter
Provide Leadership				X	X	X	X	
Establish Expectations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Measure Student Progress	X	X	X		X	X		
Promote School Climate	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Establish Goals and Purposes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

ature.

Implications

There is obviously a need to continue, even intensify, school effectiveness research. Having examined a number of papers and journal articles, three recommendations for evaluating the effects of instructional leadership are presented. The first is to focus future research on the so-called average schools. Case studies in such schools would be of great interest to educators. The second is to more clearly define and accurately describe specific instructional leadership behaviors since most cases are stated in vague and general terms. For example, while emphasizing instruction emerged as a key behavior, it is not clear what the principals actually did to improve reading instruction.

The third recommendation concerns the expectations of students. While it is not in a strict sense of leadership behavior and was not included in the report, results of each of the eight studies pointed toward association between high expectation by staff and positive school outcomes. While this is consistent with Rosenthal's (1968) concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, research should focus on the specific role the principal plays in evaluating (or depressing) staff expectations.

A reasonably extensive body of evidence gathered by respected researchers through in-depth study supports the proposition that the principal makes the difference in reading achievement. Of equal importance, five leadership behaviors associated with effective reading programs have a salutary effect for two reasons:

1) they provide direction for all administrators and,

2) they lend credence to reading effectiveness research--

by showcasing interstudy consistency.

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